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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000788

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STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: A/S ROCCA'S DISCUSSIONS ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In meetings with Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and political leaders on April 20, Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca and the Ambassador urged greater flexibility from both the GSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in approaching the peace process. The A/S and Ambassador cautioned that the lack of progress could result in less attention to the issue from the international community. While each interlocutor asserted its organization's unwavering support for peace in principle, each also cited numerous stumbling blocks to resumed progress on the peace front.
End summary.

PM: JVP Ready to Play Ball

2. (C) In a meeting with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse on April 20, Assistant Secretary Rocca, accompanied by the Ambassador, expressed U.S. concern that internal politics was impeding efforts to achieve peace with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Prime Minister responded that, in his personal opinion, the government erred in not involving the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Government's alliance partner, at the beginning of the peace process. A long-time opponent of the JVP, the PM said he now felt that the alliance partner would be cooperative in the GSL's efforts to go forward with the peace process. The Ambassador noted a number of other policy differences between the GSL and the JVP, especially on the economic front. Rajapakse responded that he believes it best to work with the JVP on an issue-by-issue basis, rather than attempt to confront the party on the whole waterfront of policy differences. The alliance party officials meet weekly to discuss and agree on issues, he added.

3. (C) Rajapakse mentioned that he had recently visited Northern Ireland to study the peace process there. He told A/S Rocca he saw one major difference between the two peace processes. In Northern Ireland, the leaders want peace but do not have the support of the populace. In Sri Lanka, he said, the citizens want peace, but the leaders are fighting and are unable to lead people to peace.

URGING PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE

4. (C) In an April 20 meeting with Foreign Secretary H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, A/S Rocca and the Ambassador reiterated strong U.S. support for the peace process but cautioned that international sympathy could wane in the face of the extended stalemate. While there may be legitimate reasons for careful deliberations before resuming dialogue, "to the outside world, it looks like nothing is progressing in Sri Lanka. People don't want to hear about all the details," the Ambassador advised. The world's attention will shift elsewhere if Sri Lanka cannot move ahead, A/S Rocca stressed.

5. (C) Agreeing that the stalemate cannot go on indefinitely, Palihakkara then commenced a lengthy explanation of the difficulties the government faced dealing with an unelected terrorist group claiming sovereignty and unwilling to compromise on any issue. JVP intransigence also rendered the situation complex, he admitted, but the JVP presented less of an obstacle than the LTTE. "They won't stand in the way of an agreement, even if they make political trouble for the President," he opined.

WILL THE REAL OPPOSITION PLEASE STAND UP?
UNP, JVP APPROACHES TO PEACE PROCESS

6. (C) A/S Rocca's April 20 discussion with Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe and other United National Party (UNP) leaders revealed little daylight between GSL and UNP

views of the peace process. Wickremasinghe stressed the UNP is ready to support the President on the peace process, but she must decide if she wants to continue a partnership with the JVP. He remarked that her relationship with the JVP is strained; JVP opposition to the joint mechanism on tsunami aid and the proposed Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) is preventing progress. A/S Rocca cautioned that while the U.S. wants to see the peace process continue, if internal politics continue to get in the way, international attention could begin to drift.

17. (C) UNP MP Milinda Moragoda raised the possibility of including India in the Co-chairs group (an idea he has pushed for some time), adding that lately both the Indian Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have shown more interest in Sri

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Lanka and the process. When A/S Rocca asked if they wanted to "be in the tent," he replied, "India doesn't want to be in the tent, but neither do they want anyone else in the tent." The GSL views Indian participation favorably, he asserted, and the LTTE is interested in dialogue and would not necessarily be against Indian involvement. A/S Rocca assured her UNP interlocutors that the U.S. ensures its South Asia policies are very transparent to India and that India seems comfortable with U.S. aims and activities here. She added that the Indians did not raise the Co-Chair issue during her visit to New Delhi two days earlier. Nevertheless, she said she would bring the issue back to Washington.

18. (C) In a separate meeting April 20, JVP Leader Somawansa Amarasinghe told A/S Rocca and the Ambassador that while the JVP, like everyone in Sri Lanka, wanted lasting peace, its stance on the peace process adheres strictly to what was agreed upon in the coalition manifesto. This limits the range of possible options to restart talks, he indicated, since any initiatives to deal with the LTTE and jumpstart the peace process must not stray from the manifesto. He complained that the GSL has already ceded too much to the LTTE without garnering any guarantees that the LTTE will put down its weapons or give up its fight for an independent state.

19. (C) Amarasinghe asserted that the JVP is not against Norwegian facilitators per se but what he described as their partiality and tendency to go beyond their consultative role. He cited unsubstantiated rumors that the Norwegians were using their diplomatic immunity to import equipment for the LTTE and vowed that the JVP was "waiting for the Norwegians to correct themselves" and become more objective before the party would meet with them. Amarasinghe did not agree with the Ambassador's suggestions that the JVP meet with Norwegian officials to discuss these concerns in person instead of relying on dubious media reports.

MUSLIMS CLAMOR FOR PLACE AT TABLE

10. (C) In his April 20 discussion with A/S Rocca and the Ambassador, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauff Hakeem expressed disappointment that the GSL and the LTTE continue to exclude the Muslim community in any discussions on the joint mechanism. He cautioned that the growing frustration among Muslims in the north and east, especially given the slow pace of reconstruction, could encourage greater radicalization in that sector of the population. Hakeem argued that the international community, led by the United States, should help ensure that all minorities in the north and east be allowed a seat at the negotiating table. He reported that the few meetings on the matter that the SLMC have had with government officials have resulted in little more than unfulfilled promises of greater coordination. Responding to the Ambassador's question about whether Muslim MPs from the ruling parties could provide a voice for Muslim interests, Hakeem asserted that even those MPs would welcome a more institutionalized Muslim role.

TNA ACKNOWLEDGES LTTE VIOLENCE;
ALLEGES GSL AID TO PARAMILITARIES

11. (C) In a separate meeting on April 20, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs R. Sampanthan (Trincomalee) and Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam (Jaffna) told A/S Rocca and the Ambassador that no one—including the LTTE—wants to return to hostilities. Sampanthan said that the GSL may have thought it could levy LTTE factional fighting (which he described as "the Karuna disturbance") into greater political advantage, but now appears to appreciate the futility of that aim. President Kumaratunga seems to realize this, he commented, but is prevented by her JVP ally from adopting a more accommodating position.

12. (C) Besides using every opportunity to obstruct dialogue, the JVP is trying to subvert the principle of devolution, enshrined in the 13th Amendment, by usurping the

functions and responsibilities accorded to the Provincial Councils, Sampanthan charged. For example, the JVP is "becoming more aggressive" in allocating resources in ministries under its control, e.g., irrigation, fisheries and agriculture, he said. In particular, the MP asserted, the JVP is trying to divert irrigation resources away from Tamil and Muslim families in the east to provide water for "Sinhalese resettlement" in the area. In Trincomalee, for example, the JVP had halted a Japanese project to rehabilitate irrigation tanks that would have benefited 900 Tamil families, he claimed.

113. (C) Unfortunately, the LTTE's continued violence gives the JVP mileage to oppose possible GSL concessions, the Ambassador remarked. The LTTE's ongoing assassinations of political opponents make it difficult to argue that progress in changing Tiger behavior is being made, he observed. A/S Rocca and the Ambassador reiterated that if the LTTE renounces violence in word and deed, the U.S. would re-examine its policy.

114. (C) "We don't defend the killing of opponents," Sampanthan responded, although he cited alleged GSL support to armed anti-LTTE paramilitaries as a partial explanation for continued Tiger violence. The Tigers want to change; they have to change; the Tamil people want them to change, he continued, but they have to be given the opportunity to do so. The LTTE entered the ceasefire as a "ruthless, diabolical, militant organization." It is "unfortunate that it has not been given any responsibility or encouragement by the Government" since then to transform itself, he charged. If the LTTE were given a greater stake in the democratic process, it would have to accept the tenets of pluralism, diversity and human rights, he said. "We have to bring them in," he concluded.

COMMENT

115. (C) Our interlocutors' comments on the peace process indicate little movement on long-entrenched positions and no fresh initiatives to end the stalemate. Prospects for agreement on a GSL/LTTE "joint mechanism" on tsunami relief seem brighter, however (septel), and may offer the best hope of resumed progress in the near term.

116. (U) A/S Rocca has cleared this message.

ENTWISTLE